

The food industry's provision of allergen information to consumers

Area of research interest: [Food hypersensitivity](#)

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Conducted by: IFF Research

Background

The Food Information Regulations 2014, together with the European Union Food Information for Consumers Regulation No 1169/2011 (EU FIC) made it a legal requirement for UK food businesses serving non-prepacked foods, including prepacked foods for direct sale (PPDS), to inform their customers if any of 14 main allergens were used as an ingredient.

In 2012, in advance of the introduction of the FIC, the FSA undertook research with food businesses to understand the existing provision of allergen information for non-prepacked foods.

The primary aim of this follow-up study was to build on [the 2012 baseline](#), and provide insight into the current provision of information on allergenic ingredients for non-prepacked foods, and how practices have changed since the FIC came into effect.

In addition, the research aimed to assess food business awareness and readiness for legislative changes regarding incoming new information requirements for PPDS foods from October 2021.

Research approach

In order to meet the research aims, a multi-method research approach was undertaken. The study comprised of four phases combining survey and qualitative research techniques. The research approach replicated the method of the 2012 baseline stage 1 study.

- A scoping phase comprising of nine qualitative interviews with key industry stakeholders in January 2020 to ensure up-to-date knowledge of the business landscape;
- A quantitative survey of 2,303 food business operators (FBO) in February to March 2020 to enable robust statistical analyses of FBO practices in relation to allergens;
- A small survey of 55 market traders (stalls and mobile food vans) in February to March 2020.
- Follow-up qualitative interviews with 21 FBOs and market traders that had taken part in the survey to provide in-depth insight into particular areas of interest. These interviews took place in September to October 2020.

Results

Overall, the 2014 legislation has had a positive effect on the allergen information provided by businesses for non-prepacked food.

Provision of information on allergens

The vast majority of FBOs said that they provide written or verbal information about each of the allergens they sold, ranging from 93% for mustard, and 94% for lupin, sulphur dioxide and molluscs, to 98% for gluten. 88% of FBOs provided written or verbal information on all the 14 allergens they sold that are covered by the EU FIC regulation. In 2012, only around half of FBOs or fewer provided information on mustard (51%), celery (50%) and sulphur dioxide (44%), rising to four-fifths for peanuts (80%) and other nuts (81%).

Allergen labelling policies

Almost all food businesses (95% of 2,303) reported having a written (83%) or informal policy (12%) in place on allergen labelling – up from 60% in 2012. This includes a large majority of market traders. Of 55 market traders, 93% had either written (78%) or informal (15%) policies, increasing from 57% in 2012.

Checking allergenic ingredients

Almost all food businesses (99.9%) had processes in place to check if a product contains allergenic ingredients if asked by consumers – up from 92% in 2012. Close to nine in ten food businesses (86%) check or audit the ingredients they obtain from suppliers and wholesalers (71% in 2012).

Training staff

Nearly half of food businesses had received formal training on food allergens (49%), increasing from a third (34%) reporting this in 2012. Almost all FBOs provided staff with allergen information (99%), most commonly through verbal training (90%) or formal training for all new staff (88%).

PPDS changes

Four in every five FBOs selling PPDS foods (78%) currently label all allergenic ingredients on PPDS foods (62% label all ingredients). Overall, 59% of FBOs were aware of the food information amendment, although this increased to 64% among those selling PPDS foods and to four in five FBOs that only sold PPDS foods (79%).

You can find more detail and qualitative findings in the final report.

Research report

PDF

[View The food industry's provision of allergen information to consumers - research report as PDF\(Open in a new window\)](#) (1.31 MB)

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EXCEL

[View FSA industry allergen information research 2020 FBO tables as Excel\(Open in a new window\)](#) (800.46 KB)

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